

A continuous metaphor: theater in revolutionary road

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



Richard Yates's *Revolutionary Road* unveils the emptiness of suburban life by incorporating a play into the opening paragraphs and then continuing a metaphor of theater throughout the rest of the novel. The novel opens with theatrical failure that foreshadows the evident downfall of Frank and April's lives. The book characters take on their own theatrical roles in the suburban setting they are all forced to act in. The theatrical production of the opening chapter becomes an enduring metaphor that starts in the author's decision to begin the novel with a production of *The Petrified Forest*, and is fulfilled through the performances of both Frank and April as they strive to act in a way that lines up with their suburban lifestyle.

The Laurel Players presentation of *The Petrified Forest* juxtaposed with the rest of the novel uncovers the truth of the suburbs. Painfully embarrassing, the cast's performance becomes difficult to watch. The audience cringes with each passing moment as April attempts to play her part. While acting, April is described as having "lost her grip" causing the audience to all become "embarrassed for her" as "she had begun to alternate between false theatrical gestures and a white-knuckled immobility" (Yates, *Revolutionary Road*). Her failure at playing her part in the play foreshadows her inability to fulfill her role as a submissive house-wife. Similar to the cast of *The Petrified Forest*, every character in the novel is reading a "cultural script" given to them by the social interpretation of what life in the suburbs should mirror. Every character in this suburbia follows the same pattern of conformity found in the production of a play. The characters are "painfully alive in a drugged and dying culture" (Yates, *Revolutionary Road*). They stick to their cultural scripts, never straying away from its guidance.

Additionally, Yates's choice to have April star in the production of *The Petrified Forest* becomes a foreshadowing of her restlessness. In both the novel and the play, the characters find rescue from their failure in death. In *The Petrified Forest*, Alan escapes the torments of his failure through death and Gabby finds freedom in Alan's life insurance policy as it allows her to begin a new life in Europe. Before his death Alan says, "Living, I'm worth nothing to her. Dead - I can buy her the tallest cathedrals, and golden vineyards, and dancing in the streets" (Sherwood, *The Petrified Forest*). This mindset is displayed in April's death as well because she too gave her spouse a way to start fresh. After her death, Frank sent away their kids and finally had the opportunity to unlock his true potential as a man.

April and Frank are either arguing or pretending as if everything is okay when it clearly is not. They lead a life switching between staged events in which they appear to be merely reading a script, or messy arguments that reveal their true flaws in both their marriage and themselves. April finds herself lost in a game of pretend as she tries to be the submissive house wife that she is expected to embody. After Frank's support for her in her play, she feels as if she owes it to him to be the typical wife he thought he wanted. However, she secretly longs to find a greater purpose for her life outside of the discriminatory definition of being a wife in the suburbs. April is a leading actress, in *The Petrified Forest* and in the Wheelers' life on *Revolutionary Road*, and in both productions she longs for escape. In both her role as a wife to Frank and in *The Petrified Forest*, April "was working alone, and visibly weakening with every line" (Yates, *Revolutionary Road*). Sadly, April puts on

the greatest performance of her life on the day of her death. On the morning of her botched abortion, she makes one final attempt at performing the role of the submissive house-wife which becomes her most convincing act yet. She appears to be everything her husband could ask for, but little do they realize she is only a few hours from her death.

Frank plays the part of an intellectual. He has himself and others convinced that he is destined for greatness, held back by the confines of the suburbs where his unique talent is going to waste. When given the chance to move to Paris and make something of himself, his true persona is revealed and the character he is playing is called out for being a fraud. April saw Paris as a way that they could redefine themselves, she would be the breadwinner and he would chase his dreams. He looks for a way to get out of the move and finds his rescue in April's surprise pregnancy. Frank hides behind the person he is pretending to be. His dialogue towards the end of the novel seems to be scripted, further unfolding the play metaphor.

Yates's use of a continuous metaphor brings depth to the novel that would not exist otherwise. April and Frank act as both characters in a novel and actors in a play. Beginning the novel with a production of *The Petrified Forest* foreshadows the inevitable fate that the novel's characters will meet. Though the production is a memorable segment of the novel in its own right, the fate of the Laurel Players also highlights Frank and April's joint failure at living the suburban life.

Works Cited

Yates, Richard. *Revolutionary Road*. Klim, 2011. Print.

Sherwood, Robert Emmet. *The Petrified Forest: A Play in Three Acts*.

Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1962.